**The Orange by Wendy Cope**

At lunchtime I bought a huge orange—

The size of it made us all laugh.

I peeled it and shared it with Robert and Dave—

They got quarters and I had a half.

And that orange, it made me so happy,

As ordinary things often do

Just lately. The shopping. A walk in the park.

This is peace and contentment. It’s new.

The rest of the day was quite easy.

I did all the jobs on my list

And enjoyed them and had some time over.

I love you. I’m glad I exist.

**Hungry Ghost by Debjani Chatterjee**

Today I went shopping with my father   
after many years. I felt I was back   
in time to when I'd follow grandfather   
to the market, smelling the spicy scents,   
drinking the sights and mingling with the shouts.   
Neither buyer nor seller, I would float   
like a restless spirit, hungry for life.

The market is bigger. I have grown too.   
There are more goods as distances have shrunk.   
The prices are higher. I understand   
about money and, alas, its bondage   
of buyers and sellers. Almost I wish   
I was again that hungry ghost, watchful   
and floating through the world's noisy bazaar.

**The Bells by Edgar Allan Poe**

I  
Hear the sledges with the bells -   
Silver bells!  
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!  
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,  
In the icy air of night!  
While the stars that oversprinkle  
All the heavens seem to twinkle  
With a crystalline delight;  
Keeping time, time, time,  
In a sort of Runic rhyme,  
To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells  
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,  
Bells, bells, bells -   
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.  
  
II  
Hear the mellow wedding bells -   
Golden bells!  
What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!  
Through the balmy air of night  
How they ring out their delight!  
From the molten-golden notes,  
And all in tune,  
What a liquid ditty floats  
To the turtle-dove that listens, while she gloats  
On the moon!  
Oh, from out the sounding cells  
What a gush of euphony voluminously wells!  
How it swells!  
How it dwells  
On the Future! -how it tells  
Of the rapture that impels  
To the swinging and the ringing  
Of the bells, bells, bells,  
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,  
Bells, bells, bells -   
To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells!  
  
III  
Hear the loud alarum bells -   
Brazen bells!

What a tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!  
In the startled ear of night  
How they scream out their affright!  
Too much horrified to speak,  
They can only shriek, shriek,  
Out of tune,  
In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire,  
In a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic fire,  
Leaping higher, higher, higher,  
With a desperate desire,  
And a resolute endeavor  
Now -now to sit or never,  
By the side of the pale-faced moon.  
Oh, the bells, bells, bells!  
What a tale their terror tells  
Of despair!  
How they clang, and clash, and roar!  
What a horror they outpour  
On the bosom of the palpitating air!  
Yet the ear it fully knows,  
By the twanging  
And the clanging,  
How the danger ebbs and flows;  
Yet the ear distinctly tells,  
In the jangling  
And the wrangling,  
How the danger sinks and swells,  
By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the bells -   
Of the bells,  
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,  
Bells, bells, bells -   
In the clamor and the clangor of the bells!  
  
IV  
Hear the tolling of the bells -   
Iron bells!  
What a world of solemn thought their monody compels!  
In the silence of the night,  
How we shiver with affright  
At the melancholy menace of their tone!  
For every sound that floats  
From the rust within their throats  
Is a groan.  
And the people -ah, the people -   
They that dwell up in the steeple,  
All alone,  
And who tolling, tolling, tolling,  
In that muffled monotone,  
Feel a glory in so rolling  
On the human heart a stone -   
They are neither man nor woman -   
They are neither brute nor human -   
They are Ghouls:  
And their king it is who tolls;  
And he rolls, rolls, rolls,  
Rolls  
A paean from the bells!  
And his merry bosom swells  
With the paean of the bells!  
And he dances, and he yells;  
Keeping time, time, time,  
In a sort of Runic rhyme,  
To the paean of the bells,  
Of the bells -   
Keeping time, time, time,  
In a sort of Runic rhyme,  
To the throbbing of the bells,  
Of the bells, bells, bells -   
To the sobbing of the bells;  
Keeping time, time, time,  
As he knells, knells, knells,  
In a happy Runic rhyme,  
To the rolling of the bells,  
Of the bells, bells, bells -   
To the tolling of the bells,  
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,  
Bells, bells, bells -   
To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

**Birches by Robert Frost**

When I see birches bend to left and right   
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,   
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.   
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay.   
Ice-storms do that. Often you must have seen them   
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning   
After a rain. They click upon themselves   
As the breeze rises, and turn many-coloured   
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.   
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells   
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust   
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away   
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.   
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,   
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed   
So low for long, they never right themselves:   
You may see their trunks arching in the woods   
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground,   
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair   
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.   
But I was going to say when Truth broke in   
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm,   
I should prefer to have some boy bend them   
As he went out and in to fetch the cows--   
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,   
Whose only play was what he found himself,   
Summer or winter, and could play alone.   
One by one he subdued his father's trees   
By riding them down over and over again   
Until he took the stiffness out of them,   
And not one but hung limp, not one was left   
For him to conquer. He learned all there was   
To learn about not launching out too soon   
And so not carrying the tree away   
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise   
To the top branches, climbing carefully   
With the same pains you use to fill a cup   
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.   
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,   
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.   
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.   
And so I dream of going back to be.   
It's when I'm weary of considerations,   
And life is too much like a pathless wood   
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs   
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping   
From a twig's having lashed across it open.   
I'd like to get away from earth awhile   
And then come back to it and begin over.   
May no fate wilfully misunderstand me   
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away   
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:   
I don't know where it's likely to go better.   
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree~   
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk   
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,   
But dipped its top and set me down again.   
That would be good both going and coming back.   
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

Geraldine Moore the Poet by Toni Cade Bambara

Geraldine paused at the corner to pull up her knee socks. The rubber bands she was using to hold them up made her legs itch. She dropped her books on the sidewalk while she gave a good scratch. But when she pulled the socks up again, two fingers poked right through the top of her left one.

“That stupid dog,” she muttered to herself, grabbing her books and crossing against traffic. “First he chews up my gym suit and gets me into trouble, and now my socks.”

Geraldine shifted her books to the other hand and kept muttering angrily to herself about Mrs. Watson’s dog, which she minded two days a week for a dollar. She passed the hot-dog man on the corner and waved. He shrugged as if to say business was very bad.

*Must be,* she though to herself. *Three guys before you had to pack up and forget it. Nobody’s got hot-dog money around here.*

Geraldine turned down her street, wondering what her sister Anita would have for her lunch. She was glad she didn’t have to eat the free lunches in high school any more. She was sick of the funny-looking tomato soup and the dried-out cheese sandwiches and those oranges that were more green than orange.

When Geraldine’s mother first took sick and went away, Geraldine had been on her own except when Miss Gladys next door came in on Thursdays and cleaned the apartment and made a meat loaf so Geraldine could have dinner. But in those days Geraldine never quite managed to get breakfast for herself. So she’d sit through social studies class, scraping her feet to cover up the noise of her stomach growling.

Now Anita, Geraldine’s older sister, was living at home waiting for her husband to get out of the Army. She usually had something good for lunch—chicken and dumplings if she managed to get up in time, or baked ham from the night before and sweet-potato bread. But even if there was only a hot dog and some baked beans—sometimes just a TV dinner if those soap operas kept Anita glued to the TV set—anything was better than the noisy school lunchroom where monitors kept pushing you into a straight line or rushing you to the tables. Anything was better than that.

Geraldine was almost home when she stopped dead. Right outside her building was a pile of furniture and some boxes. That wasn’t anything new. She had seen people get put out in the street before, but this time the ironing board looked familiar. And she recognized the big, ugly sofa standing on its arm, its underbelly showing the hole where Mrs. Watson’s dog had gotten to it.

Miss Gladys was sitting on the stoop, and she looked up and took off her glasses. “Well, Gerry,” she said slowly, wiping her glasses on the hem of her dress, “looks like you’ll be staying with me for a while.” She looked at the men carrying out a big box with an old doll sticking up over the edge. “Anita’s upstairs. Go on up and get your lunch.”

Geraldine stepped past the old woman and almost bumped into the superintendent. He took off his cap to wipe away the sweat.

“Darn shame,” he said to no one in particular. “Poor people sure got a hard row to hoe.”

“That’s the truth,” said Miss Gladys, standing up with her hands on her hips to watch the men set things on the sidewalk.

Upstairs, Geraldine went into the apartment and found Anita in the kitchen.

“I dunno, Gerry,” Anita said. “I just don’t know what we’re going to do, But everything’s going to be all right soon as Ma gets well.” Anita’s voice cracked as she set a bowl of soup before Geraldine.

“What’s this?” Geraldine said.

“It's tomato soup, Gerry.”

Geraldine was about to say something. But when she looked up at her big sister, she saw how Anita’s face was getting all twisted as she began to cry.

That afternoon, Mr. Stern, the geometry teacher, started drawing cubes and cylinders on the board. Geraldine sat at her desk adding up a column of figures in the notebook—the rent, the light and gas bills, a new gym suit, some socks. Maybe they would move somewhere else, and she could have her own room. Geraldine turned the squares and triangles into little houses in the country.

“For your homework,” Mr. Stern was saying with his back to the class, “set up your problems this way.” He wrote GIVEN: in the large letters, and then gave the formula for the first problem. Then he wrote TO FIND: and listed three items they were to include in their answers.

Geraldine started to raise her hand to ask what all these squares and angles had to do with solving real problems, like the ones she had. *Better not,* she warned herself, and sat on her hands. *Your big mouth got you in trouble last term.*

In hygiene class, Mrs. Potter kept saying that the body was a wonderful machine. Every time Geraldine looked up from her notebook, she would hear the same thing. “Right now your body is manufacturing all the proteins and tissues and energy you will need to get through tomorrow.”

And Geraldine kept wondering, *How? How does my body know what it will need, when I don’t even know what I’ll need to get through tomorrow?*

As she headed down the hall to her next class, Geraldine remembered that she hadn’t done the homework for English. Mrs. Scott had said to write a poem, and Geraldine had meant to do it at lunchtime. After all, there was nothing to it—a flower here, a raindrop there, moon, June, rose, nose. But the men carrying off the furniture had made her forget.

“And now put away your books,” Mrs. Scott was saying as Geraldine tried to scribble a poem quickly. “Today we can give King Arthur’s knights a rest. Let’s talk about poetry.”

Mrs. Scott moved up and down the aisles, talking about her favorite poems and reciting a line now and then. She got very excited whenever she passed a desk and could pick up the homework from a student who had remembered to do the assignment.

“A poem is your own special way of saying what you feel and what you see,” Mrs. Scott went on, her lips moist. It was her favorite subject.

“Some poets write about the light that…that…makes the world sunny,” she said, passing Geraldine’s desk. “Sometimes an idea takes the form of a picture—an image.”

For almost half an hour, Mrs. Scott stood at the front of the room, reading poems and talking about the lives of the great poets. Geraldine drew more houses, and designs for curtains.

“So for those who haven’t done their homework, try it now,” Mrs. Scott said. “Try expressing what it is like to be…to be alive in this…this glorious world.”

“Oh, brother,” Geraldine muttered to herself as Mrs. Scott moved up and down the aisles again, waving her hands and leaning over the students’ shoulders and saying, “That’s nice,” or “Keep trying.” Finally she came to Geraldine’s desk and stopped, looking down at her.

“I can’t write a poem,” Geraldine said flatly, before she even realized she was going to speak at all. She said it very loudly, and the whole class looked up.

“And why not?” Mrs. Scott asked, looking hurt.

“I can’t write a poem, Mrs. Scott, because nothing lovely’s been happening in my life. I haven’t seen a flower since Mother’s Day, and the sun don’t even shine on my side of the street. No robins come sing on my window sill.”

Geraldine swallowed hard. She thought about saying that her father doesn’t even come to visit any more, but changed her mind. “Just the rain comes,” she went on, “and the bills come, and the men to move out our furniture. I’m sorry, but I can’t write no pretty poem.”

Teddy Johnson leaned over and was about to giggle and crack the whole class up, but Mrs. Scott looked so serious that he changed his mind.

“You have just said the most…the most poetic thing, Geraldine Moore,” said Mrs. Scott. Her hands flew up to touch the silk scarf around her neck. “’Nothing lovely’s been happening in my life.’” She repeated it so quietly that everyone had to lean forward to hear.

“Class,” Mrs. Scott said very sadly, clearing her throat, “you have just heard the best poem you will ever hear. She went to the board and stood there for a long time staring at the chalk in her hand.

“I’d like you to copy it down,” she said. She wrote it just as Geraldine had said it, bad grammar and all.

*Nothing lovely’s been happening in my life.*

*I haven’t seen a flower since Mother’s Day,*

*And the sun don’t even shine on my side of the street.*

*No robins come sing on my window sill.*

*Just the rain comes, and the bills come,*

*And the men to move out our furniture.*

*I’m sorry, but I can’t write no pretty poem.*

Mrs. Scott stopped writing, but she kept her back to the class for a longtime —long after Geraldine had closed her notebook.

And even when the bell rang, and everyone came over to smile at Geraldine or to tap her on the shoulder or to kid her about being the school poet, Geraldine waited for Mrs. Scott to put the chalk down and turn around. Finally Geraldine stacked up her books and started to leave. Then she thought she heard a whimper—the way Mrs. Watson’s dog whimpered sometimes—and she saw Mrs. Scott’s shoulders shake a little.